



UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

HARNESS, DICKEY & PIERCE PLC
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RESTON, VA 20195

In re Application of	:	
Hoffmann	:	DECISION
Application No.: 09/820,146	:	
Filing Date: 28 March, 2001	:	
Attorney Docket No. Hoffmann 3	:	

This is a decision on the petition filed on 13 November, 2006, to revive the instant application under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) as abandoned due to unavoidable delay.

The Office regrets the delay in addressing this matter, however, the instant petition was presented to the attorneys in the Office of Petitions only at this writing.¹

For the reasons set forth below, the petition as considered under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) is **DISMISSED**.

NOTES:

- (1) Any petition (and fee) for reconsideration of this decision under 37 C.F.R.

¹ **NOTE:** Monitoring of the status of applications on PAIR can inform one's management of application responses and provide an indication when mailings of Office actions should be expected. Status Inquiries filed at three (3) or four (4) month intervals provide a demonstration of diligence and attention in supporting a petition seeking relief under 37 C.F.R. §1.181.

§1.137(a) (as to unavoidable delay) or an alternative request for relief under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b)² (as to unintentional delay) must be submitted within two (2) months from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 C.F.R. §1.136(a) are permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover letter entitled "Renewed Petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a)"; and/or "Petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b)";

- (2) Thereafter, there will be no further reconsideration of this matter.

BACKGROUND

The record reflects that:

- Petitioner failed to reply timely and properly to a non-final Office action mailed on 10 January, 2006, with reply due absent extension of time on or before 10 April 2006;
- the application went abandoned by operation of law after midnight 10 April, 2006;
- the Office mailed the Notice of Abandonment on 10 October, 2006;
- on 13 November, 2006, Petitioner submitted the instant petition and fee, an amendment after final as a reply, which the Examiner has indicated will be entered, and made a statement of unavoidable delay—averring therein that while Petitioner filed a Revocation/Power of Attorney and Change of address on 17 November, 2003, it appears that the Office did not enter that information of record.

The record further reflects that, following filing of the application, a Revocation/Power of Attorney was submitted on 31 January, 2003, and thereafter, resubmitted on 16 April, 2003, over the signatures of officers (Corporate Counsel and Managing Corporate Counsel) of the Assignee. The instruction set forth there was honored by the Office.

Indeed, however, the Office appears not to have entered a paper later filed by Petitioner in

² Effective December 1, 1997, the provisions of 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) now provide that where the delay in reply was unintentional, a petition may be filed to revive an abandoned application or a lapsed patent pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b). a grantable petition filed under the provisions of 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) must be accompanied by:

(1) the required reply, unless previously filed. In a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute, the required reply may be met by the filing of a continuing application. In an application or patent, abandoned or lapsed for failure to pay the issue fee or any portion thereof, the required reply must be the payment of the issue fee or any outstanding balance thereof.

(2) the petition fee as set forth in 37 C.F.R. §1.17(m);

(3) a statement that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) was unintentional. The Commissioner may require additional information where there is a question whether the delay was unintentional; and

(4) any terminal disclaimer (and fee set forth in 37 C.F.R. §1.20(d)) required pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(c). (Emphasis supplied.)

November 2003—that condition appears to result from the fact that the Revocation/Power of Attorney submitted on 17 November, 2003, was signed not by an appropriate officer of the Assignee, but by one of the interim-appointed attorneys.

The Rules of Practice (37 C.F.R. Part 1) and the Commentary set forth in the Manual of Patent Examining Procedure (MPEP) speak to the revocation of power from and appointment of attorneys and agents by an applicant/patentee or the assignee of the entire interest in the application. (See: 37 C.F.R. §1.36 and MPEP §204.05 and §204.07)—but not to such authority by an attorney appointed in the interim.

Moreover—and notably—while the papers mailed by the Office in this matter on 2 July, 2004, on 21 September, 2004, on 21 April, 2005, and on 11 July, 2005, all were addressed to prior Counsel, they nonetheless appear to have reached Petitioner, who replied thereto.

Thus, even if there was an error by the Office—and at this writing the record appears silent to such—Petitioner appears to have taken no action of record to Notice or otherwise diligently and with due care³ inform the Office of the alleged error in the mailing address or otherwise to re-advance its Revocation/Power of Attorney.

This does not appear to satisfy Petitioner's duty under Pratt.

Not only does it appear that there was questionable authority to file the November 2003 Revocation/Power of Attorney, but Petitioner appears then to have ignored from November 2003 until November 2006 the condition of which he now complains.

Such delay is not unavoidable.

Out of an abundance of caution, Petitioners always should note that those registered to practice *and* all others who make representations before the Office are reminded to inquire into the underlying facts of representations made to the Office and support averments with the appropriate documentation—since all owe to the Office the continuing duty to disclose.⁴

³ The "due care" of a reasonably prudent person standard has been applied in deciding petitions under the "unavoidable delay" standard of 35 U.S.C 133. See *In re Mattullath*, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912) ("the word 'unavoidable' is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business") (quoting and adopting *Ex parte Pratt*, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33); see also *Ray v. Lehman*, 55 F.3d 606, 609, 34 USPQ2d 1786, 1787 (Fed. Cir. 1995) ("in determining whether a delay was unavoidable, one looks to whether the party exercised the due care of a reasonably prudent person").

⁴ See supplement of 17 June, 1999. The Patent and Trademark Office is relying on petitioner's duty of candor and good faith and accepting a statement made by Petitioner. See *Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure*, 62 *Fed. Reg.* at 53160 and 53178, 1203 *Off. Gaz. Pat. Office* at 88 and 103 (responses to comments 64 and 109)(applicant obligated under 37 C.F.R. §10.18 to inquire into the underlying facts and circumstances when providing statements to the Patent and Trademark Office).

Specifically, the regulations at 37 C.F.R. §10.18 provide:

STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Congress has authorized the Commissioner to "revive an application if the delay is shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner to have been "unavoidable." 35 U.S.C. §133 (1994).⁵

The regulations at 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) and (b) set forth the requirements for a petitioner to revive a previously unavoidably or unintentionally, respectively, abandoned application under this congressional grant of authority. The language of 35 U.S.C. §133 and 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) is clear, unambiguous, and without qualification: the delay in tendering the reply to the outstanding Office action, as well as filing the first petition seeking revival, must have been unavoidable for

§ 10.18 Signature and certificate for correspondence filed in the Patent and Trademark Office.

(a) For all documents filed in the Office in patent, trademark, and other non-patent matters, except for correspondence that is required to be signed by the applicant or party, each piece of correspondence filed by a practitioner in the Patent and Trademark Office must bear a signature by such practitioner complying with the provisions of §1.4(d), §1.4(e), or § 2.193(c)(1) of this chapter.

(b) By presenting to the Office (whether by signing, filing, submitting, or later advocating) any paper, the party presenting such paper, whether a practitioner or non-practitioner, is certifying that—

(1) All statements made therein of the party's own knowledge are true, all statements made therein on information and belief are believed to be true, and all statements made therein are made with the knowledge that whoever, in any matter within the jurisdiction of the Patent and Trademark Office, knowingly and willfully falsifies, conceals, or covers up by any trick, scheme, or device a material fact, or makes any false, fictitious or fraudulent statements or representations, or makes or uses any false writing or document knowing the same to contain any false, fictitious or fraudulent statement or entry, shall be subject to the penalties set forth under 18 U.S.C. 1001, and that violations of this paragraph may jeopardize the validity of the application or document, or the validity or enforceability of any patent, trademark registration, or certificate resulting therefrom; and

(2) To the best of the party's knowledge, information and belief, formed after an inquiry reasonable under the circumstances, that —

(i) The paper is not being presented for any improper purpose, such as to harass someone or to cause unnecessary delay or needless increase in the cost of prosecution before the Office;

(ii) The claims and other legal contentions therein are warranted by existing law or by a nonfrivolous argument for the extension, modification, or reversal of existing law or the establishment of new law;

(iii) The allegations and other factual contentions have evidentiary support or, if specifically so identified, are likely to have evidentiary support after a reasonable opportunity for further investigation or discovery; and

(iv) The denials of factual contentions are warranted on the evidence, or if specifically so identified, are reasonably based on a lack of information or belief.

(c) Violations of paragraph (b)(1) of this section by a practitioner or non-practitioner may jeopardize the validity of the application or document, or the validity or enforceability of any patent, trademark registration, or certificate resulting therefrom. Violations of any of paragraphs (b)(2)(i) through (iv) of this section are, after notice and reasonable opportunity to respond, subject to such sanctions as deemed appropriate by the Commissioner, or the Commissioner's designee, which may include, but are not limited to, any combination of —

(1) Holding certain facts to have been established;

(2) Returning papers;

(3) Precluding a party from filing a paper, or presenting or contesting an issue;

(4) Imposing a monetary sanction;

(5) Requiring a terminal disclaimer for the period of the delay; or

(6) Terminating the proceedings in the Patent and Trademark Office.

(d) Any practitioner violating the provisions of this section may also be subject to disciplinary action. See § 10.23(c)(15).

[Added 50 FR 5175, Feb. 6, 1985, effective Mar. 8, 1985; para. (a) revised, 58 FR 54494, Oct. 22, 1993, effective Nov. 22, 1993; paras. (a) & (b) revised, paras. (c) & (d) added, 62 FR 53131, Oct. 10, 1997, effective Dec. 1, 1997; para. (a) revised, 69 FR 56481, Sept. 21, 2004, effective Oct. 21, 2004]

⁵ 35 U.S.C. §133 provides:

35 U.S.C. §133 Time for prosecuting application.

Upon failure of the applicant to prosecute the application within six months after any action therein, of which notice has been given or mailed to the applicant, or within such shorter time, not less than thirty days, as fixed by the Commissioner in such action, the application shall be regarded as abandoned by the parties thereto, unless it be shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that such delay was unavoidable.

the reply now to be accepted on petition.⁶

Delays in responding properly raise the question whether delays are unavoidable.⁷ Where there is a question whether the delay was unavoidable, Petitioners must meet the burden of establishing that the delay was unavoidable within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. §133 and 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a).⁸ And the Petitioner must be diligent in attending to the matter.⁹ Failure to do so does not constitute the care required under Pratt, and so cannot satisfy the test for diligence and due care.

(By contrast, unintentional delays are those that do not satisfy the very strict statutory and regulatory requirements of unavoidable delay, and also, by definition, are not intentional.¹⁰))

As to Allegations of Unavoidable Delay

The requirements for a grantable petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) are the petition and fee, a showing of unavoidable delay, a proper reply, and—where appropriate—a terminal disclaimer and fee.

Petitioner does not appear to have satisfied the “showing” requirements under the regulation.

CONCLUSION

The instant petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) is **dismissed**.

ALTERNATIVE VENUE

If Petitioner is unable to make a showing of unavoidable delay, Petitioner's only alternative to

⁶ Therefore, by example, an unavoidable delay in the payment of the Filing Fee might occur if a reply is shipped by the US Postal Service, but due to catastrophic accident, the delivery is not made.

⁷ See: *Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure; Final Rule Notice*, 62 *Fed. Reg.* at 53158-59 (October 10, 1997), 1203 *Off. Gaz. Pat. Office* at 86-87 (October 21, 1997).

⁸ See: *In re Application of G*, 11 USPQ2d 1378, 1380 (Comm'r Pats. 1989).

⁹ See: *Diligence in Filing Petitions to Revive and Petitions to Withdraw the Holding of Abandonment*, 1124 *Off. Gaz. Pat. Office* 33 (March 19, 1991). It was and is Petitioner's burden to exercise diligence in seeking either to have the holding of abandonment withdrawn or the application revived. See 1124 *Off. Gaz. Pat. Office supra*.

¹⁰ Therefore, by example, an unintentional delay in the reply might occur if the reply and transmittal form are to be prepared for shipment by the US Postal Service, but other pressing matters distract one's attention and the mail is not timely deposited for shipment.

irretrievable abandonment is to file a petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) (state therein that "the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) was unintentional").

Petitioner may wish to refer to the guidance (as to revival of abandoned applications) found at the Office website at <http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/pac/dapp/petitionspractice.html#lapse> and/or review the guidance at http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/pac/mpep/documents/0700_711_03_c.htm#sect711.03c

Thus, Petitioner may wish to supplement the petition to plead alternatively under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) wherein the "showing" burden is much less onerous.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:¹¹

By mail: Commissioner for Patents¹²
 P.O. Box 1450
 Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

By FAX: IFW Formal Filings
 (571) 273-8300
 ATTN.: Office of Petitions

By hand: Mail Stop: Petition
 Customer Service Window
 Randolph Building
 401 Dulany Street
 Alexandria, VA 22314

¹¹ On July 15, 2005, the Central Facsimile (FAX) Number was changed to (571) 273-8300, which is the only facsimile number recognized for centralized delivery. (For further information, see: <http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/pac/dapp/opla/preognotice/cfax062005.pdf>.)

¹² To determine the appropriate addresses for other subject-specific correspondence, refer to the USPTO Web site at www.uspto.gov.

While telephone inquiries regarding this decision may be directed to the undersigned at (571) 272-3214, it is noted that all practice before the Office is in writing (see: 37 C.F.R. §1.2¹³) and the proper authority for action on any matter in this regard are the statutes (35 U.S.C.), regulations (37 C.F.R.) and the commentary on policy (MPEP). Therefore, no telephone discussion may be controlling or considered authority for Petitioner's action(s).



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¹³ The regulations at 37 C.F.R. §1.2 provide:

§1.2 Business to be transacted in writing.

All business with the Patent and Trademark Office should be transacted in writing. The personal attendance of applicants or their attorneys or agents at the Patent and Trademark Office is unnecessary. The action of the Patent and Trademark Office will be based exclusively on the written record in the Office. No attention will be paid to any alleged oral promise, stipulation, or understanding in relation to which there is disagreement or doubt.